



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 13, 2018

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee support the development of a genetics research policy for the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met on Monday to discuss Legislation No. 0030-18, which would establish and authorize the Navajo Nation Genetics Policy Development Working Group to develop a genetics research policy for the Navajo Nation, and to amend the Navajo Nation Human Research Code.

According to the legislation, in Oct. 1995 the Navajo Nation Council passed Resolution No. CO-106-95 to approve the Navajo Nation Human Research Code, and in 2002, the former Health and Social Services Committee and the Intergovernmental Relations Committee approved a moratorium on any genetic research on the Navajo Nation until the Human Research Code is amended and approved by Council.

Sponsor for the legislation, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó'ii), said the genetics research was halted because the Navajo Nation Health Research Code needed to be amended to include a comprehensive genetics research policy.

“The working group has been meeting since last spring to begin developing a genetics research policy. The previous condition was until a research policy was developed, the actual genetics research was not able to move forward. What this legislation does is recognizes the Navajo Nation Genetics Policy Development Working Group as the authorized entity to develop the policy,” said Delegate Phelps.

Delegate Phelps said the purpose for the working group is to generate data to guide the development of a culturally sound genetic research policy, understand and give prominence to Diné people’s views, and to support and further establish culturally appropriate research methodologies.

He added that there are many health issues impacting Navajo communities, and genetics research could serve as a key component in aiding the Nation to understand diseases, predict susceptibilities, aid in prevention, and determine the types of drugs that can effectively aid in healing.

Members of the working group include members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, Office of Navajo Government Development, Navajo Epidemiology Center, Navajo Department of Health, Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board, Office of the President and Vice President, traditional healers and medicine people, and specialized Navajo research experts from various universities.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) raised concerns regarding genetics research of Navajo people.

“Understanding that there are research entities out there that have already taken advantage of tribes and may even still be concealing stolen genetic samples, we have to be mindful in how we approach this project because it is a sensitive area. I would like to implore the [Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department]’s perspective on this matter,” said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown said that it was important to involve Navajo cultural experts and medicine people to be a part of the policy development, and recommended a directive to allow the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department to be a member of the working group. NNHPD is the entity that approves and issues permits to any group that seek to do any type of research on the Navajo Nation, and provides consultation if needed, added Delegate Brown.

HEHSC members voted 2-1 to approve Legislation No. 0030-18 with one directive. The Naabik’íyáti’ Committee approved the bill on Monday with a vote of 11-1 and serve as the final authority on the bill.

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